

CATARACT

What is a cataract?

A cataract is a clouding of the natural lens inside the eye. The lens is a transparent structure within the eyeball, located behind the pupil. The lens focuses light rays onto the light-sensitive cells in the retina in the back of the eye, to form a sharp image which is relayed to the brain via the optic nerve. The lens must be clear in order to focus the light properly.

When a cataract occurs, the lens loses its transparency. The cloudy lens blocks or distorts light rays passing through the eye thus causing blurred vision.

A cataract is not a tumour or a growth over the eye. It is a physical change that occurs most commonly with aging.



What are the symptoms?

As the cataract develops, you may initially be unaware of any symptoms. Later the vision becomes dull, like looking through a dirty windscreen of a car. Common complaints include:

- Cloudy, fuzzy, blurred vision
- Fading and yellowing of colours
- Difficulty seeing at night or in low light
- Frequent changes in your spectacle prescription
- Double vision within one eye
- Better near vision for a while (only in far-sighted people)
- Sensitivity to light or glare

These can also be symptoms of other eye problems.

Who gets cataracts?

Cataracts are a part of the aging process. By the age of 75, about 70% of people will have developed cataracts. Other factors increase the risk of cataract development like:

- diabetes
- family history of cataracts
- extensive exposure to sunlight
- smoking
- obesity
- high blood pressure
- previous eye surgery
- previous eye injury or inflammation of the eye
- long-term use of steroid medication
- some cataracts are congenital and are removed soon after birth.

Does cataract surgery cure other eye problems?

Cataract surgery only treats the problem of an opaque or cloudy lens. Other eye diseases are unaffected or treated by cataract surgery.

How is it treated?

Surgery should be considered when poor vision interferes with daily activities. Surgery is the only effective way to remove the cloudy lens. Cataract surgery has a very high success rate.

It is usually performed under local anaesthetic with some sedation. Most people do not need to stay in hospital overnight, but you will need someone to drive you home.

There have been many technological advances in recent years such as the use of small incisions, foldable intraocular lenses (IOLs), toric and

multifocal IOLs and effective prevention of infection. The surgery involves removal of the cloudy lens and insertion of an intraocular lens (IOL) implant. The eye is measured preoperatively by ultrasound or laser in order to calculate the correct strength of the IOL. The Femtosecond laser is available at the Eye Hospital. This laser reduces complications and increases the precision of the surgery.

**Remember to tell your ophthalmologist about any pills that you are currently taking, as some medication can impact on the surgical procedure.

After surgery

- You can read and watch TV straight after surgery.
- Use the eye drops prescribed by your doctor.
- A check-up will usually be scheduled for the day after the surgery and again within a week or two.
- Care should be taken to protect the eye. During the first week after surgery, avoid strenuous activity, bending or lifting weights over 10kg. Avoid getting any water, dust or dirt in your eye. Your ophthalmologist will advise you when you are ready to be tested for new glasses.

Can a cataract return?

A cataract cannot return because the lens has been removed. However the lens capsule, just behind the IOL implant, can become cloudy and cause symptoms similar to a cataract, usually a year or more after surgery. This cloudiness is treated by a YAG laser. The doctor uses the laser to make a tiny hole in the capsule to allow light to pass through. This is a quick, safe and painless procedure that can be done at the ophthalmologist's consulting rooms.

Possible complications of cataract surgery

Serious complications are very uncommon but they do occur.

- High pressure in the eye or glaucoma
- Blood collection in the eye
- Infection
- Drooping eyelid
- Retinal detachment

- Swelling or clouding of the cornea
- Swelling of the retina
- Partial or complete loss of vision

Please consult your doctor immediately if you are concerned.

Please note that these are general guidelines. If in doubt, consult your ophthalmologist.